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## FRENCH LITERATURE.

*Le Théâtre français au moyen âge*, par JOHAN MORTENSEN. Traduit du suédois par Emmanuel Philipot. Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1903. Pp. xxi, 254, 12<sup>mo</sup>.

The interest of the student of the theater in the French drama of the Middle Ages, and of the wider reading public as well, has suffered because of the lack of some authoritative account of its activity. The gaps in its records are unusual. For the period of its beginnings, the last of the tenth and the eleventh centuries, the serious, or liturgical drama offers sufficient texts. But for the era of its development, the twelfth century, we possess two documents only, and these two incomplete. Nor are traces of the comic stage to be found at this time. In the thirteenth century there are a few plays taken from the legends of saints, while several excellent representatives of various kinds of comedy testify to a widespread cultivation of this branch of literature. But for the fourteenth, apart from hints of performances scattered through official archives, we know of the existence of a national theater only by the one manuscript which has preserved the forty Miracles of the Virgin. As a consequence of this dearth of material we are compelled to rely on the rather extensive dramatic literature of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries for our larger views of an epoch which embraces some six hundred years: so scattered are the annals of its stage and so disconnected. To unite them in a historical narrative was not an inviting task; but Dr. Mortensen, under the impulse of presenting the subject to the educated laymen of Gottenburg, undertook it, and performed it in so satisfactory a manner that he published his lectures. These are now given a wider circle of readers through the French translation of M. Philipot.

A principle was necessary on which to base the handful of facts and give them a consistent interpretation. Dr. Mortensen found this principle in the idea of evolution. He claims that the serious drama of the Middle Ages, taking its rise in slight additions to the church service, with the object of emphasizing truths of Scripture, fell away from that service in course of time, became secularized, created historical drama, on the one hand, and the comedy of character on the other, and thus paved the way to the classical stage of the Renaissance. The comic theater also—though its history may be only surmised—passed from pantomime and coarse jests to a keener satire and the comedy of manners. The steps in this evolution are pointed out with a considerable degree of detail, in spite of the paucity of material. From the short trope of the tenth century to the long mystery of the fifteenth, all the varieties of the sacred drama are made to pass

before us, together with their content, scenery, actors and audience.

Particularly interesting is the chapter on the "Miracles." There is a novelty in the author's analysis of the forty plays contained in the Cange manuscript, an analysis which groups them in sections according to their moral import and their description of life and manners. Stress is laid on their popular tendency, on their freedom in choice of subject, on their psychological development—particularly the substitution of evil men for the traditional devils—and their realism. They mark thus the transition from the sacred mystery to the plays of the secular theater. Further than this, their unity of action, the compactness and symmetry of their structure represent the dramatic ideals of the French mind and foreshadow the classical stage of the seventeenth century. To this chapter should be added the pages on the mysteries in pantomime of the fourteenth century, and their descendants in the sacred drama, and the evolution of one kind of these pantomimes into the secular mysteries of the fifteenth, an evolution to which the secular "miracle" probably contributed.

But Dr. Mortensen's favorite among the representatives of the mediæval theater is the "moralité." Had the Renaissance intervened in France as it did in Spain and England, to elevate and strengthen and not to destroy, the "moralité" would have been the starting point of a new and higher form of theatrical composition, as it was the culmination of the old. The "moralité" became, in the fourteenth century, the dramatic legatee of the didactic and allegorical poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth. It produced of itself two distinct kinds of play, the purely allegorical "moralité," in which virtues and vices are personified, and the "histoire," which points a moral by means of a dramatized story. The "moralité" at times called dancing and singing to its aid, and its capacity for striking decorations and brilliant costumes made it peculiarly the play for festivals and holidays. As ecclesiastical tradition does not survive in the "moralité," and as its subjects are often wholly secular, its moral teaching, enforced by studies of contemporary life, frequently give it the dignity of the higher comedy of manners.

The discussion of the comic drama takes up a comparatively small section of the book—one fifth, to the four fifths of the serious drama. In this part Dr. Mortensen's treatment of the "farce" is the most suggestive and novel. He explains it, in the light of its etymology, as an *intermezzo*—a scene between acts. It is well-known that the term "farce" was applied to interpolations in the liturgy of the church. These interpolations would naturally pass into the liturgical drama. They would finally fix their name to the comic scenes inserted between the serious episodes. Later simi-

lar comic scenes, acted apart by themselves, would be termed "farces." A vestige of the early use of the word is found in certain short "moralités," which are called "farces," though they do not contain anything of a comic nature. There are few texts, to be sure, which can be adduced to support this argument, derived as it is from etymology and analogy. The independent "farce" is practically the only kind which has been preserved. Yet Dr. Mortensen finds occasional indications of such a development. For instance, the devils were the comic characters of the serious drama, and quite likely held impromptu dialogues with one another or with some personage of the play. A "miracle" of the fourteenth century, in which one devil tells another of a trick he will play on an amorous monk, shows how this theory could be well supported by facts. Afterwards, when the *fableau* died away and made the "farce" its residuary legatee, there is no question of the juxtaposition of the comic scene and the serious play. This explanation of the "farce" seems scientifically sound and reasonable. It is certainly preferable to the older one, of the mixture of dialects.

Criticism of so excellent a work is invidious. Indeed, it safely challenges criticism. The general public should be satisfied with it, for its story is connected, clear and complete. Students of mediæval literature and the drama will find it useful, for it is exact and scholarly, as well as readable. The expression of personal views on the part of the author, the result of practical research, lend additional value to his statements, and form a distinct contribution to literary history. One might suggest that a short bibliography would not be out of place, nor a few details on the manuscripts which contain the early tropes and fragments of the liturgical drama. And we might take issue with Dr. Mortensen on the question of the influence he ascribes to the "moralité" on the comedy of character of the seventeenth century (pp. 251-252). Is it possible to connect the "moralité" with *le menteur*, *Tartuffe*, and *l'Avare*? These plays, and their likes, personified vices (or virtues) much as the "moralité" had done. But would not this correspondence spring from the same cause, which is adduced in a previous chapter (pp. 91-92) to explain the likeness of Classical tragedy to the "miracle," namely, racial tendency?

Typographical errors are few. The year of Bodel's crusade should be 1202 instead of 1248 (p. 52); *xii*<sup>o</sup> should read *xiii*<sup>o</sup> (p. 85, l. 15 and p. 204, l. 5); *xi*<sup>o</sup> should read *xv*<sup>o</sup> (p. 232, l. 15). On p. 217, l. 15 "*siècle précédent*" seems to be a slip of the pen, for "*siècle suivant*."

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

### THE *Three Days' Tournament*.

To the Editors of *Mod. Lang. Notes*.

SIRS:—There are one or two points in Dr. Nitze's notice of '*The Three Days' Tournament*' to which I shall be glad if you will allow me to reply. Like many scholars unfamiliar with the practical study of folk-lore, your reviewer fails, I think, to realize the true bearings of the problem in question. Yet it is very simple—given an incident of frequent occurrence, alike in literary romance and popular folk-tale, how are we to explain the coincidences? Are the two groups of independent origin, or did the one borrow from the other? And if this latter, which, romance or folk-tale, is the lender, which the borrower?

For the student of literary sources such questions are surely important. Will Dr. Nitze, as an Arthurian scholar, venture to assert that it is a matter of indifference whether this great Romantic cycle be the product of conscious literary invention, or of evolution? I scarcely think so. And if it be not a matter of indifference the 'utility' of such studies is practically admitted; by these means alone can we solve the problem.

And why minimize the results? Here on the one side we have a group of romances, small, practically of one date, and closely interrelated. On the other an enormous body of folk-tale, widely-spread, of indefinite antiquity (I have quoted Mr. Joseph Jacobs' suggestion that the many colored horses find their origin in Indian mythology), and hailing from lands where no trace of Arthurian tradition has been found. Mediæval knights certainly were given to disguising themselves, and a romance *might*, as Dr. Nitze suggests, have invented this particular disguise, but it would be very curious had the hypothetical romance, whether Map or another, *independently* hit upon the same costume and colors as those adopted by the folk-tale hero. I am glad to see Dr. Nitze does not venture to suggest that this latter borrowed from the Arthurian knight. So far as I can gather he would prefer to believe that the two groups arose independently. Were he really familiar with the mass of evidence contained in the works of M. Cosquin, W. Campbell, Mr. Hackland, and others, of which I have only cited a part, he would I think admit that the '*gesammte beweisende Material*' is ready at hand. Or does he really think these writers deal only with 'modern' folk-tale?

Since writing my study I have discovered that the triplet red, white, black occurs also in '*Salomon and Murkolf*,' the red, white, green variant I have noted as in the '*Queste*,' thus giving us